

J's Hut (A Space Academy Story)

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Category: Voltron

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-03 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-03 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 17:12:19

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,264

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Set in a time before the Voltron series, a bet leads to a date that goes horribly wrong... Reviews welcome

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> <meta name="Author"> J's Hut FORWARD by the author:

I'd like to think that this story can stand on its own, but it helps if you are at

>least passingly familiar with the Voltron series of the 80's, both the lions and the <br>vehicle version. Chronologically, this story takes place before those series, but

>features characters from both shows, as well as some of my own creation. <p>

Comments & Criticism welcome.

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>Voltron <br>A Tale from the Space Academy

J's Hut

> By Mea <p>

The Space Academy. This was a place where the best and the brightest

>of the Galaxy Alliance youth could learn, train, and study to one day become <br>future leaders in the universe. The students represented the best of

>the best, for many of the Academy graduates had gone on to become noted <br>explorers, pilots, generals, leaders, and so on.

> Which is not to say that any of them was even remotely perfect.

<br> = = = = = =

> "Move, I wanna see!" <br> "Hold on, hold on!"

> "Hurry up!" <br> "Can you see mine?"

> "Will you guys MOVE!" <br> "I'm afraid to look."

> "Come on, it can't be that bad." <br> The group of cadets crowded around the bulletin board trying to catch

>a glimpse of their mid-term test flight scores. Like any group of students <br>waiting for grades, they were a group filled with excitement, trepidations, >and impatience; the score sheet had barely had time to settle before the <br>masses crowded in.

> "Mira! I see yours!" <br> "What is it, Lisa? Tell me! Pleeeease! I can't get near it!"

> "Looks like... Ninety-seven point forty-five!" <br> "Can you see his?"

> "I'm looking- Hey watch it!- I think I see it..." <br> "What is it?"

> "Hold on, let me get out first." <br> The straight-haired brunette carefully wove her way out of the crowd >of people and rejoined her friend at the edge of the mob. <br> "So?" Mira asked eagerly, "what did he get?"

> "Aren't you even going to ask how I did?" Lisa asked in mock hurt tones. <br> "Sorry, I've been thinking about the bet. How did you do?"

> "Ninety-two point sixty-three." <br> "Hey that's good. I couldn't see for sure but it looked like there >were a lot of seventies and eighties on there." <br> "There were. That second leg of the course got a lot of people."

> Mira frowned. "It did? I thought it was the best part." <br> Lisa laughed. Her friend Mira was one of the top pilots and >definitely the fastest learner in their class (at least when it came to new <br>air and space craft). There were few to rival her skills with a ship. One >of them was... <br> "Lance. He wasn't here. Think he knows his score already?" Mira >asked her friend. <br> Lisa shrugged. " I don't know. They were just posted. Maybe he >decided to wait." <br> Mira stopped and looked at her with eyebrow raised. "This is Lance >we're talking about here. So, you saw his score; tell me what he got!" <br> "I don't know if I should..."

> "LISA! All right, fine. I guess I'll go back there myself and- <br> "Ninety-seven..." Lisa began.

> Mira held her breath. <br> "...Point..."

> She crossed her fingers and winced. <br> "...Fifteen."

> "YES!! I WIN!!" <br> Both girls burst into giggling squeals.

> They stopped only when they noticed they were being stared at. They <br>looked up to see a familiar face looking at them with a raised eyebrow, >which made them both start laughing again. <br> "Hi Sven," Mira managed to gasp out at last.

> "Hello," the dark-haired cadet answered cautiously. Part of him was <br>worried that he might be part of a joke the two were sharing.

"What's so >funny?" <br> "Nothing," the two of them answered together, getting more giggles.

> "Oh-kay," he nodded, and took a small step backwards; there were some <br>things he just didn't want to know.

> "Sven, have you seen Lance?" said Lisa between giggles. <br> He thought a moment. "Does this have someting to do with a bet I >heard about?" <br> Mira grinned. "Yup."

> "Lance bet that he'd get a higher score than her on the flight test," <br>Lisa supplied. "The loser takes the winner out to dinner."

> "Oh," said Sven. This was hardly surprising; Mira and Lance had a

<br>history of competing against each other since the day they had met at the  
>academy. They seemed to swing between dating and trying to outclass each <br>other.  
> "So, have you seen him?" <br> "No, I don't think...Vait, there he is. Over there."  
> They looked to where he was pointing; the crowd around the board had <br>thinned, leaving a few people milling around, and one person in a brown  
>leather jacket staring darkly at the posted results. <br> Slowly, he turned and looked at them.  
> Mira grinned her broadest and wiggled her fingers in a wave. <br> He grimaced.  
> "I think he's seen the scores," Sven remarked. "Maybe ve should go?" <br> "You're right," Lisa agreed. "Mira-"  
> "Don't worry, I'll tell you everything that happens." <br> "Promise?"  
> "As soon as I get back, Lisa, I'll give you every detail. Promise."  
<br> "Okay, see you in Trig."  
> After waving her goodbyes to her friends, Mira casually sauntered <br>over next to Lance. She could almost feel his annoyance, but after the arrogant  
>way he'd made the bet in the first place, she found it nice to see <br>his ego taken down a peg.  
> "Good score," she said. <br> He grunted a response.  
> "You know, I bet it was that third checkpoint that got you," she <br>continued, savoring the moment. "If you don't hit that  
\_just\_right\_ it can  
>completely throw you off for the next turn." <br> "youwin." he muttered.  
> "What was that? I don't believe I heard that quite right." <br> "You. Win," said Lance evenly, then his face broke into a smile.  
  
>"Didn't think I could say it, did you." <br> "I did wonder. Good flight though."  
> "Hm. Not good enough." <br> "Serves you right, Mr.  
'I-know-this-course-better-than-my-own-sock-  
>drawer'. The bet was your idea, so looks like you're going to have to live <br>with it."  
> "Okay, okay, okay. I said it. You won. Dinner's on me." <br> "So, when should I expect my newly-won dinner, hmm?" she smirked.  
> "How about Saturday. I'll pick you up at seven." <br> "Tomorrow? That's pretty quick. You have something in mind?"  
> "Oh, believe me," he said, smiling a devious smile, "I've got a GREAT <br>place in mind..."  
> = = = = = <br> "Lance, how did you find this place?"  
> "I got lucky." <br> "Define lucky."  
> The "place" Mira was referring to was a hole in the wall called <br>"J's Hut" several miles from the edge of the city. It was also the place  
>Lance had taken her for dinner. <br> A layer of greasy haze lay over the room like a thin blanket, coating  
>everything in a thin layer of grime. A few tables were set haphazardly <br>around the room set with chairs, many of which had makeshift repairs on  
>their legs and back. Towards the back, there was a faded, worn pool table <br>(classic, not 4D) and an even more worn dart board that hung on a wall  
>covered in gouges, not all of which came from darts. A burly bartender <br>(Mira assumed this must be "J") halfheartedly tended

the battered bar, and

>behind him, an old chalkboard listed the menu, such as it was, barely <br>legible through layers of chalk leavings. It looked as if nothing in the

>place had been cleaned since the First Galactic Expansion. That included <br>the clientele, two dozen or so customers that fit the atmosphere so well,

>she wondered if they had found the place or had been built with it. Now she <br>understood why Lance had insisted on casual clothes; if they'd been

>dressed nice, they wouldn't have had a prayer of blending in. Even though <br>the patrons seemed to be ignoring them anyway, she was sure the two

>of them stuck out like a pair of sore thumbs. <br> "We agreed the loser takes the winner to dinner," Lance said smugly,

>"We never said where." <br> She wanted to glare at him, but that would give him too much

>satisfaction. Instead she pressed onward in the conversation. <br> "You never answered my question. HOW did you find this place?"

> "Saw it once when I was going into the city. You know, I always <br>wondered what it was like in here."

> "You just can't stand losing, can you." <br> He flashed a wide grin at her. "I learned from the best."

> "Oh shut up." <br> "We can still leave if you want."

> "No, I'm not letting you off that easy." It was true he wasn't the <br>only one who hated losing. "We'll eat here. And I'm going to have fun even

>if it kills me." <br> "Better be careful, the food might."

> She ignored his latest joke and peered at the chalky smears that made <br>up the menu. The writing was barely legible through the smudges, she had to

>squint to make out each item. <br> "See anything you want?" Lance asked.

> "Number two looks okay. If I'm reading it correctly." <br> "Sounds good. I'll order for us. I'll see if the pool table's free

>too. Be right back." <br> He left her by the door and strode over to the bar. Half of her

>wanted to just turn around and march out of there, but like she said, she <br>wasn't letting him off that easy, and that meant at least staying through

>dinner. Instead of walking out the door, she made her way to the pool <br>table.

> Lance was talking to the bartender; who he seemed to be getting <br>along with pretty well. After a moment, he turned and waved an "okay" about

>the pool table, so at least they'd have something to do. Her pool game was <br>a little weak; she didn't get much time to practice at the academy, and

>she'd never played before she got there, but like most of the pilots, it <br>seemed to come naturally, even though most of them could probably beat the

>socks off of her. <br> Mira gazed at the double rack of pool cues. There were about a

>dozen, most of them appeared to be in decent shape as she examined them <br>closely. Only one of them was obviously warped (and looked like it had

>taken a few years of abuse anyway), so she started taking them down, one at <br>a time and checking them for straightness, until she found one she liked.

>By then, Lance was coming back with a pair of small plastic baskets

with the <br>food inside.

> "Here you go, one number two," he said, setting it down on the pool <br>table. "Hope you're hungry."

> "Thanks," she said, and reluctantly picked up the sandwich from it's <br>nest of potato chips in the basket.

> "Let me get a cue, and we can get started. Say, loser buys the <br>winner the next dinner?"

> "Do I look that stupid? No, wait. Don't even think of <br>answering that."

> Lance smirked and went over to the rack. <br> She took a bite of the sandwich. Surprisingly, it was good; warmed

>just right with a hint of mustard (she liked mustard), and bread toasted <br>just enough to be crisp, but not break into crumbs when you bit it. Everything

>tasted fresh too; she'd half expected it to be older than the <br>academy, but she was obviously wrong.

> She briefly debated about telling him as she watched him decide on a <br>pool cue when she noticed something.

> It was odd; Lance barely looked at the cues until he came to one with <br>a double green stripe in the end, took it down, checked it over once, then

>returned to the table. <br> In the few times they had played before, he'd take each cue down,

>check it for straightness, and move on to the next until he found the one he <br>liked. This time, he knew exactly which one he wanted almost before he

>started looking, and the only way he could do that was if he'd been here <br>before, not just once, but many times. Enough times to know which pool cue

>he liked without trying them all. <br> She thoughtfully chewed on her sandwich. Why had he lied when he

>said he hadn't been here before? Was it he didn't want anyone to know he <br>frequented this place? It seemed silly... well, maybe not to him. She'd

>never claimed to understand him, so maybe, just maybe... <br> Maybe to him, this place, J's Hut was HIS place, his corner of the

>universe that no one else knew about where you could go to get as far away <br>from everything in life. But that would be silly, since he brought her

>here; it would stop it from being HIS place. <br> Wouldn't it?

> "You ready?" <br> She snapped back to the present. "Sorry, I wasn't paying attention."

> He motioned to the table. "Ready?" <br> "Sure. Go ahead, break."

> With a little appropriate flourish, he chalked up his cue, took aim, <br>and sent the white ball on a collision course with the small cluster of

>colored sphere. Technicolor numbered orbs careened across the green canvas, <br>eventually slowing to a halt, but not before a bright yellow one disappeared

>down one of the side holes. <br> Lance looked over the arrangement on the table and carefully took aim

>again." <br> "Five ball in the corner pocket."

> He launched the cue ball across the table, where it knocked into a <br>green-striped ball, sending it leisurely rolling across the table to nudge

>the precariously balanced five into the gaping pocket. <br> "Nice shot," Mira remarked.

> "Thanks." <br> The reply was a reflex, Lance was completely

engrossed in his next shot.

>There was something about pilots and pool, the former always seemed  
<br>to excel at the latter. Maybe it had to do with spacial geometry;  
the fact

>that you had to be aware of forces and vectors if you were to fly  
out there, <br>and some of those instincts carried over into the  
game. It was all vectors

>and paths and angles that wove into a simple game. <br> Lance's  
third shot sent the blue 2 across the table where it  
>leisurely bumped off the edge of the side pocket. He gave a small  
snort of <br>disappointment, and stepped away from the table, which  
meant it was Mira's

>turn. <br> Mira surveyed the table from several angles; there was  
the 11, but it

>was so close to the edge, she'd probably scratch. Maybe the 13,  
though she'd <br>probably end up sinking his 4 in the process. The 15  
looked like the easiest

>shot, but even it wasn't great. <br> She leaned over the table, drew  
the cue back, and practice aimed once

>or twice. "15, side pocket." <br> "From there?"

> She didn't look up. "Got a better idea." <br> "Maybe. Try aiming  
for the 10, like this," he leaned over her to

>direct her shot. As he did, she could feel his breath brush her  
cheek, <br>sending an almost electric charge through her skin. It  
felt like the room's

>temperature had just jumped ten degrees with the closeness of his  
body. <br> "You know," she said in a low voice, "If I didn't know  
better, I'd

>think you were trying to distract me." <br> "Why would I do that?"  
he asked quietly.

> "I don't distract easily." She turned enough to look deep into his  
<br>brown eyes, eyes you could get lost in.

> "You didn't answer my question," murmured Lance. <br> "And you  
didn't answer mine," she said softly, drawing herself a  
>little closer to him. <br> "It's just a game."

> "It's never just a game. Not with us." <br> "...I know."

> Their eyes closed, she could almost feel his kiss when... <br>  
"WA-HOO!"

> Mira jumped; they both did, and the world snapped rudely back into  
<br>focus.

> A pair of scruffy-looking men had come in, each obviously way past  
drunk, <br>and were swaggering their way up to the bar talking loudly  
about the car race

>they'd just come from. The rest of the patrons were ignoring them.  
<br> "...and I don't care WHUT anyone says," the first drunk  
continued,

>"that Emmerson boy in number 27 is the MAN! Ain't no driver gonna  
beat him <br>THIS season! Where's th' BEER!" he added, pounding on  
the bar for emphasis.

> Lance and Mira looked at each other; the moment had not only been  
<br>killed, it was already six feet under.

> Mira quickly composed herself. "Off number 10, huh. Right.  
<br>Number 10."

> Focusing was hard, but the shot wasn't: cueball off the 10, 10 of  
the <br>15, 15 down the hole. Even so, she still had trouble  
centering herself

>completely, and missed her next shot. And it still felt warm inside.  
<br> She picked up her sandwich as she watched him get ready for the  
next

>shot; what was she thinking? They'd never been able to get along for

any <br>length of time, yet for some reason, whenever he was around, she couldn't

>think of anything else BUT him. This was crazy; he was completely wrong for <br>her, he never took anything seriously, he was always trying to play an

>angle, always had some snide remark... he was positively infuriating! But <br>sometimes, when it was just them, she'd see something, she couldn't put her

>finger on it, something...something... <br> Something big was standing beside her.

> She turned to find herself facing a gap-toothed grin belonging to one <br>of the two drunks.

> "Hey, beautiful," he slurred. "Howzabout a purdy little thing like <br>you joinin' us for a couple uh drinks."

> "Sorry," she replied, "I only date within my species," <br> "Tha's all right Hon, I don't even believe 'n God m'self," the grin

>widened, exposing gums that hadn't seen a toothbrush in years. <br>"That's too bad, guess you're going to have to have fun without me."

> "Aww, c'mon! Yur the purdiest little thing in here, why doncha come <br>celebrate wi' us?"

> "I can think of a lot of reasons..." <br> "...Like she's with me," Lance finished for her, putting his arm >protectively around her shoulder. <br> Lance to the rescue, she thought, who'd believe it?

> "Yur with him?" the drunk asked. <br> Mira nodded.

> "Well, you gotcherself quite a catch there, boy!" he said, giving <br>Lance a hearty thump on the back that nearly knocked him over. "Yessir,

>quite a looker. GrrrRAARR!" he leered at Mira and licked his teeth. <br> At this, Mira rolled her eyes and took a bite of her dinner in

>disgust. <br> "Y'know, I wuz watchin' you play. Yuh seem purdy good at pool, boy,

>but how're yuh at darts?" <br> "Darts?"

> "Yeah, darts. Like whatcha play with that dartboard over there."

<br> Lance thought a second. "I've played once or twice. Why?"

> Mira nearly choked on her sandwich; once or twice? She'd seen Lance <br>play against Cliff at least once a week for the past cycle (Cliff won a lot,

>but the games were always close). Okay, technically it wasn't the same as <br>the board here since their board was electronic and this one obviously

>wasn't, but still... <br> "Good! Lessee how good yuh are. Loser buys a round to the house."

> There was WAAY too much betting involving food around here, Mira <br>thought, but decided to stay quiet.

> "Well, I don't know..." There was a hint of taunting in Lance's <br>voice, but it was lost on the behemoth.

> "What, yuh not MAN enough?" <br> "Well, since you put it that way, what's one game."

> Oh boy, thought Mira, this is going to be a slaughter. <br> "Great! Lemme get th' darts. Hey you! Where're th' darts? We wanna

>play!" <br> As the drunk stomped over to the bartender, Mira leaned in and

>whispered to Lance, "Isn't a bet how you got into this in the first place?" <br> "Come on, he's so drunk he can't even look straight."

> "True, but maybe, you should let him win," she added. <br> "Would

YOU let him win?" Lance whispered back.

> "...No." <br> "And you think I would?"

> "Just don't say I didn't warn you. I don't think he's a good loser." <br> "I bet he passes out before the game's over with," Lance smirked,

>"Just watch." <br> "Like I have a choice," she muttered, settling against the pool table

>and their unfinished game. <br> At this point, the drunk came back proudly bearing a set of darts

>like an Olympic torch in one hand, and a beer bottle in the other. He took <br>Lance by the shoulder and half lead, half dragged him over to the dartboard.

>He pointed down to a faded white line painted in the hardwood. <br> "Tha's the line yuh have t' stand behind t'play. I'll go first.

>Here're yur darts." <br> He thrust a handful of metal spikes in Lance's direction, which Lance

>took carefully, trying not to stab himself. Satisfied, the drunk set his <br>beer on the nearest table and stepped up to the line.

> "Watch this," he said, aimed a dart, and let it fly. <br> With a quiet "thok", the dart stuck in corkboard near the seventeen.

> The next two stuck for eighteen and eleven. <br> "Not bad, huh?" the drunk grinned.

> "Pretty good." <br> "Yur turn, boy. Beat that!"

> Here it comes, Mira thought. <br> Lance aimed, squinted once, aimed again, and threw. And again. And

>again. <br> "Let's see," Lance remarked smugly, "that's a twenty, another

>twenty, and, looks like a bull's eye. That's good, right?" <br> He heard a bottle break against the floor beside him and turned in

>time to dodge the fist launched at his face. <br> "Hey! Take it easy!"

> "Yur makin' fun uh me!" the drunk slurred, fury burning in his <br>already bloodshot eyes, "NOBODY duzzat t'ME!"

> He swung again. Lance easily dodged it, but he could tell that there <br>was a crowd starting to gather to watch the two of them, finding this far

>more exciting than their drinks. <br> Mira called to him. "I warned you!"

> "I know!" he answered, blocking the next punch and quickly <br>counterpunching his attacker, much to the crowd's approval.

> Mira shook her head and tried not to get shoved by the cheering (and <br>mostly drunk) crowd as they watched one of their fellow drunks stagger after

>Lance. There was no question in her mind that he'd make short work out of <br>the drunk, academy training or not. Hopefully, this would be over quickly.

> ...Except the drunk's friend was trying to sneak up behind Lance with <br>a pool cue.

> So much for fair play. <br> She was behind him in two strides, and tapped him on the shoulder.

> He turned. "Whut?" <br> "This was supposed to be a FAIR fight."

> Then she socked him across the jaw. <br> He fell into the crowd, which jeeringly shoved him back at her,

>giving her another shot, and basically signaled a general free-for-all brawl <br>among the spectators as J's Hut exploded in chaos.

> Glasses sailed across the room, smashing into walls (and

<br>occasionally, people) and rained sparkling shards of glass and showers of  
>liquor over the room. Chairs and stools quickly took on new lives as  
<br>kindling and splinters. And all around people threw themselves into the  
>brawl not caring who they hit. In no time, Lance and Mira found themselves <br>fighting back to back.  
> "You didn't plan this, did you?" Mira yelled over her shoulder.  
<br> "No!" he yelled back, "There hasn't... there hasn't been a fight here  
>in months!" <br> "Terrific."  
> "Incoming!" <br> A bottle breezed by her head. "Thanks."  
> "Thank me later." <br> "Right."  
> They had certain advantages over the rest of the rabble. <br> One: they were still sober.  
> Two: they were back to back, which meant no one was getting a cheap <br>shot on them from behind.  
> And three: they were probably the only ones there with any kind of <br>formal hand-to-hand training (though the other people likely had lots of  
>INformal hand-to-hand experience). <br> Which is why they were winning when the authorities finally showed up.  
> = = = = = <br> [Knock Knock]  
> "Just a moment!" <br> The door opened and the smiling face of Mira's roommate Ginger poked  
>around. <br> "Lisa! Hi!"  
> "Hi Ginger. I came to see Mira. Is she here?" <br> "Not yet."  
> Lisa frowned. "They're not back yet?" <br> "Nope. Hey, come in. I've got popcorn."  
> She reluctantly followed Ginger into the dorm room. Ginger was <br>obviously in for the evening, dressed in an oversized T-shirt that reached her  
>knees with a picture of a cat on it, and a pair of pink fuzzy slippers. She <br>took a large bowl of popcorn from the pinker side of the room and offered it  
>to Lisa. <br> "You're not worried?" asked Lisa, taking a handful.  
  
> "No, of course not. They're probably having a great time and lost <br>track. Don't they just make such a perfect couple?"  
> "A perfect couple of what," Lisa muttered under her breath. <br> "You don't think so?"  
> Lisa wanted to say Yes, that's exactly what I think. She decided <br>against it because part of her agreed with Ginger; when they were together  
>there was a kind of chemistry. Sometimes it was like nitro and glycerin, but <br>other times, there was a real magic there. If only they weren't so STUBBORN...  
> The phone rang. Ginger picked it up. <br> "Hello..? Oh hi! We were just talking about you... Sure, what's a >roommate for?.. okay... She's right here if you want to tell-... You're <br>WHERE?!?!!... No, I... But how did-... Okay.... How much?... Mira, I'm going  
>to have to tell Commander Pastors about this... He's going to find out <br>anyway... uh- huh... I know, but maybe he'll cover bail... Uh-huh... I  
>know... Okay, I'll tell them... Bye." <br> She slowly hung up the phone and looked at Lisa.  
> "I don't think their date went well." <br> = = = = =  
> "A barroom brawl," Commander Pastors' voice said coldly as he stared <br>down at the two cadets in his office who tried not to

squirm under his gaze.

> They weren't sure if he wanted an answer from them, or was he just  
<br>stating facts, his tone was somewhere in between.

> "A barroom BRAWL," he said again, this time changing emphasis. <br>"yessir," Lance and Mira mumbled together.

> The commander leaned back in his chair and looked them over. <br>"Frankly, I am appalled. Behavior like this is completely unacceptable

>to the Academy." He paused to look down at the reports on his desk.

"And <br>this... I don't care which of you started it, and I don't care who just

>happened to be caught up in what happened; you obviously were both involved and <br>will have to face the consequences."

> Mira noticeable cringed at this; Lance merely looked nervous but hid <br>it better.

> "Besides this incident going on your permanent record, the two of you <br>will be spending the next two days in the stockade, and in the meantime, I

>want both of you to write a dissertation for me on conduct becoming a soldier. <br>I'll have the details sent to you. There will be someone to escort you to

>there when you leave my office. That is all. Dismissed. " <br> The two cadets snapped a salute, turned, and walked out of the office.

> Once in the hallway, Mira's body slouched in depression. "I can't <br>BELIEVE this is happening. And on my record too!"

> "Uh-huh," Lance grudgingly agreed. <br> "I'm never going to get a commission now! I can't... I mean, I can't..."

>oh this is awful. I am so dead." <br> "What did Pastors mean by 'which one of us started it'?"

> Mira snapped out of her self-pity. "What?" <br> "I said, what did Pastors mean by 'which one of us started it'?"

> "I don't know. I thought it would be pretty obvious, especially after I <br>knocked that guy into the crowd."

> Lance stopped walking. "You said you started it?" <br> "Well... yeah. I guess I did. I mean, everybody were just watching >until I did that. You were just defending yourself until then." <br>"Is that what you said?"

> "Well... kinda." She thought a moment. "Just out of curiosity, what <br>did YOU say?"

> He tried not to smile. "I said that the guy came after me, I punched <br>him, and then everything went crazy... and you were only defending yourself.

>I... did take you there in the first place." <br> Mira laughed. So did Lance.

> "No wonder he couldn't tell which of us started it. Any normal person <br>would be trying to blame the other guy. But not us." said Mira as they

>started walking again. <br> "Mira, I'm really sorry, it wasn't supposed to happen like that."

> "It's okay. I kind of figured Even you couldn't plan a disaster like <br>that."

> "Thanks, I think." <br> "Anyway, it wasn't THAT bad. The food was okay and I'm starting to get

>better at pool. I guess it was kind of fun." <br> "...Really?"

> "Yeah. Until the fight started. How's your head?" <br> He fingered the four stitches on his forehead. "If anyone needs

>someone to play Frankenstein, I'm set, but I'll live. How's your arm?" <br> "Better," she said, wiggling the fingers on her left hand, the same

>hand that was now wrapped in a soft brace. "It's only a sprain.  
Should heal <br>before we finish our sentence."  
> "Yeah. That." <br> "...I wouldn't mind going back sometime. If you  
don't mind."  
> [blink] "You liked it that much?" <br> "Yeah, it... it kind of  
grows on you."  
> "Like fungus?" <br> "Ha ha. I'm being serious you know. I like your  
place."  
> If he noticed that he referred to it as "his place", he didn't let  
on, <br>though a bit of a smile crept over the edge of his mouth.  
  
> "Well, if you really want to go back, I guess we could try." <br>  
"Think they'll let us back in after what happened?"  
> "Oh, I think they won't mind," he said, and she knew he was  
certain. <br> They were quiet when they reached the door that lead  
outside to their  
>waiting escort to the stockade, almost feeling the impending doom  
outside. <br>The two of them hesitated, neither wanting to deal with  
their fate just yet,  
>but knowing there wasn't much choice. Finally, Lance took a deep  
breath and <br>opened the door.  
> The three guards looked at them stoically and quietly escorted the  
two <br>to the waiting transport.  
> Mira thought to herself during the ride: she had a sprained wrist,  
a <br>black mark on her permanent record, a dissertation to write,  
and two days in  
>the stockade, yet, for some reason, she felt good. Really, REALLY  
good. <br>Maybe she was crazy. Maybe it was shock that was keeping  
her from seeing some  
>aspect of the situation, or maybe... <br> She looked over at Lance,  
his eyes meeting hers, and decided that maybe  
>life was good, and she'd leave it at that. <br> She wondered if the  
stockade had cable.

FIN  
> <p>

End  
file.